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AUTHOR Hoyle, Karen Nelson
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ABSTRACT

In the five years since 260,000 Indochinese refugees of diverse language backgrounds departed their homelands for resettlement in 31 countries around the world, libraries have responded to the challenge of providing children's literature by acquiring reading materials in the language of origin, translations, and books about the homeland. This paper describes the efforts of individual libraries in such countries as Australia, Canada, Denmark, the United States, Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, and enlarges upon national programs of resource sharing already in being to propose programs of international exchange. A 25-item bibliography is provided. (RAA)

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FOR THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES; AN INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGE

By

Karen Nelson HOYLE
Curator
Children's Literature Research Collections
University of Minnesota
MINNEAPOLIS, Minnesota
USA

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Children's Literature for the Indochinese Refugees; an International Challenge

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Karen Nelson HOYLE
Curator, Children's Literature Research Collections
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota, U. S. A.

Children's literature for the Indochinese refugees scattered around the globe is an international challenge. This paper will describe the situation, survey national efforts, and suggest vehicles for international exchange.

Offers of resettlement of refugees in South East Asia preceding or during the Geneva meeting of the United Nations High Commissioner 20 and 21 July, 1979 totaled 260,000 from 31 countries. Ten thousand or more were offered by Australia, Canada, China, France, Federated Republic of Germany, United Kingdom and the United States. Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland have agreed to accept one to three thousand. In addition, Hong Kong has resettled nine thousand[1] and Japan has decided to raise its financial contribution to 50% of the total.[2]

The situation is complex, as in addition to being resettled in different countries with different languages, these refugee children speak and may read different languages. Marie Zielinska, Chief of Multilingual Biblioservice for the Public Services Branch of the National Library of Canada noted in a letter, "According to available statistics only about 7.5% of all refugees received in Canada speak Lao, Thai, Khmer or other languages. About 30% speak and read Chinese, and 62.5% read Vietnamese only.[3] Complexity prompts more ingenuity on the part of the library community to find solutions.

In the five years since the Indochinese refugees left their homelands, libraries in many countries have responded to the challenge of providing reading materials in th language of origin, translations from the language, and books about the homeland for both the refugees and the indigenous population. Some of these efforts have been described in library literature, most notable Sweden, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Germany, and the United States. "Biblioteksjanst", the central Swedish library agency, sends staff members to other countries annually to select books for the public libraries. Leonard Wertheimer surveyed 23 Canadian libraries in prepartaion for a talk he gave during the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1978. He stated, "Most of the reports from libraries have mentioned the Multilingual Biblioservice of the National Library of Canada as a major, and sometimes the only source of supply."[4] He noted that this agency purchases and distributes books in 25 non-offical languages to the country's public libraries. No less than 30% of the total books are for children.[5]

From Australia, Marina Garlick reports, "Many public libraries have also acquired foreign language books and magazines to meet the needs of ethnic groups in their areas."[6] In Singapore, "Over the last few years positive steps have been taken to generate greater interest among Singaporeans in writing for different forms of literature in all the languages,"[7] Vilasini Perumbulavil said at a Pacific Rim conference. In Germany, the EKZ (Einkaufszentrale) purchases children's books in various languages. The International Youth Library role in providing materials to immigrants in the Munich area was outlined by Walter Scherf, the Director.

In the United States, too, the American Library Association, agencies, and public libraries have identified and acquired books. In 1975, the division Association for Library Service to Children set up an ad hoc committe to concentrate on materials for the Vietnames refugees, and the Selection of Children's

Books of Various Cultures committee continues its work. The National Indochinese Clearing House Center for Applied Linguistics in Arlington, Virginia and the University of Michigan Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies in Ann Arbor have concentrated on the refugee population from that particular part of the world. San Francisco Public Library is an example for acquisition. Grace Ruth, Book Evaluation Librarian from that Office of Children's Services has purchased Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Chinese language books from a list of sources she compiled. She commented in a letter that some books are produced locally and respond to a need but are not substantial in format.[9] Two bi-lingual books have been added to the San Francisco Public Library children's book collection--Co Tich Nhi Dong: Folktales for Children in three volumes edited by Tran Van Dien and Winabelle Grittner (Grand Rapids, MI: Grandasia Publications, n.d.) and Tran-Khanh-Tuyet's The Little Weaver of Thai-Yen Village (San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1977) in English and Vietnamese.

International exchange, as well as national sharing, has already been begun, but can be enlarged. Librarians can inform one another of bibliographies, publishing companies, distribution centers, and book fairs and conferences. Bibliographies are already available in the journal Booklist for Chinese and Vietnamese children's books. Under the auspices of the Selection of Foreign Children's Books Committee, Grace Ruth and Suzanne Lo compiled and annotated one list,[10] and Julie Y. Ho, from Detroit Public Library reviewed books published in Taiwan, Republic of China.[11] The Vietnamese list was prepared by Wol Sue Lee, from the New York Public Library.[12]

A remarkable service is provided by the Information Center on Children's Cultures, a service of the United States Committee for UNICEF. The staff has annotated substantial lists of books and materials on many countries, including Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia). The books are organized in categories "non-fiction", "fiction", and "folklore", and may include films and other non-book materials and bi-lingual books. By using the form, "Book Lists,

Information Sheets and Teaching Units", one can check the lists and send a stamped self-addressed envelope to Information Center on Children's Cultures, 331 East 38th Street, New York, NY 10016.

Secondly, librarians can share information about publishers. Ethnic groups historically establish a printing press for materials in the language of their origin, and publish newspapers, periodicals and books, especially books for children. Viet Nam Publisher, for example, is already in business in Los Alamitos, California. These materials may be mimeographed or printed on cheap paper, lacking the standards for book design and binding of firmly established companies. However, the publishers who are members of the Children's Book Council are also responding to the need to provide books about the homelands of the refugees for the newcomers as well as for the citizens. Ann Nolan Clark told about eleven year old Em in To Stand Against the Wind (New York: Viking Press, 1978). Em recalled his Vietnamese village, the onslaught of the war, and the deaths of people dear to him. Viking Press also published a Cinderella-type folktale which was told to Ann Nolan Clark by Dang Manh Kha, In the Land of Small Dragon, published in 1979. Prior to the refugee resettlement, books about Viet Nam had been published by Knopf, Harvey House, Addison-Wesley, Dodd Mead, and other large houses, and these books have a new audience.

Dealers and vendors are a third consideration. Trần Hữu Nghĩa in France, Editions Thanh Long Librairie in Belgium and others in Europe should be known to North American librarians. Bùi Văn Bảo and Bhiao Liu Publication Service are located in Canada and Hong Kong respectively. Books published in Hanoi can be acquired by Ideal Foreign Books in New York. H & P Distributors of Los Alimitos, California printed a catalog of paperback books about language, martial arts, stories for teenagers, humor and suspense, love stories, psychology, history, biography and cookbooks in Vietnamese.[13]

Finally, there have been some efforts to share on an international scale, but these can be enhanced. The International Youth Library in Munich brought experts together in conjunction with the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1978. Papers are presented at the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians, which might have some impact on the world scene. Book fairs in Frankfurt, Bologna, and Singapore provide an opportunity for exchange, and finally the most effective channel could be the International Federation of Library Associations.

"The Child and the Book" was the theme for the 1978 Frankfurt Book Fair, as 1979 was designated as the International Year of the Child. Walter Scherf invited librarians and other specialists from Australia, Canada, Denmark, United States, Germany, France, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom to discuss literature for the ethnic communities within their respective countries. Regional cooperation was the theme for the 4th Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians in Bangkok in June, 1978. Book fairs bring together people who have power to implement exchange, as well as the books. In Frankfurt, there was special emphasis on books in foreign languages, books for newcomers to Germany, and books about the Third World. Held every other year, the Bologna, Italy fair is limited to children's books. Singapore, which has four official languages, provides a model with conferences, such as Writers' Workshop on Children's Books organized by the National Book Development Council of Singapore.

The International Federation of Library Associations provides the structure for exchange. The annual conference, up-to-date mailing lists of members, and publications program can provide channels for exchanging bibliographies, information about publishers and dealers, and opportunities for discussion.

Librarians are not unanimous in searching for materials in the languages of origin and about the homeland. Alan Day, in a British publication, New Library World, stated, "By providing books in their mother tongues we might in reality be doing immigrants a grave disfavour."[14] Amy Seetoo Wilson wrote an article based on research, "China Viewed Through Stories for American Children,

She summarized the 46 books in her study. "Authors...presented a biased, unreal, and old-fashioned picture of China...Since most books tend to stay in print and on the shelves in the libraries, the picture, unfortunately, continues to be passed on to young readers in the seventies."[15] Librarians therefore have to be diligent in their evaluation of books, seeking the advice of representatives of the refugee community, before acquiring the books for the library and annotating them for bibliographies.

Building collections appropriate for Indochinese refugees and the present community involves awareness of the situation, an understanding of efforts on the national level, and reaching to the international library liasons. France and Canada have need for exchange of French language materials, while Australia, New Zealand Canada, Singapore, United Kingdom, and United States can share information about English language materials. A network for exchange among librarians serving Indochinese refugee children in the thirty-one countries committed to their resettlement will enrich the book collections in all these lands.

Footnotes

[1]"After the Geneva Meeting on Refugees..." UNHR for Refugees Newsletter No. 4 (Oct.-Nov, 1979), p.5

[2]ibid. p.8

[3]Letter from Marie F. Zielinska. March 7, 1980, p.1

[4]Leonard Wertheimer, "Serving Children in Multilingual Communities," Canadian Library Journal, 36 (Feb.-Apr, 1979), p. 41.

[5]ibid.

[6]Marina Garlick, "Library Service to Migrant Children in Australia," Wilson Library Bulletin 54 (Oct. 1979), p. 105.

[7]Vilasini Perumbulavil, "Children's Books and Reading in a Plural Society--Singapore," in Sheila Egoff, One Ocean Touching. Metuchen, 1979, p. 71.

[8]Walter Scherf, "International Youth Library: Achievements and Prospects with a Multicultural Context," UNESCO Journal of Information Science, 1 (January, 1979), p. 26.

[9]Letter form Grace Ruth, February 25, 1980. p. 1.

[10]"Chinese Children's Books," Booklist 75, no. 5 (November 1, 1978), pp. 487.

[11]ibid. 74, no. 13 (March 1, 1978), pp. 1111.

[12]"Vietnamese Children's Books," Booklist 76, no. 5 (November 1, 1979), pp. 436-437.

[13](Catalog). H & P. Los Alamitos, CA: H & P Distributors, n.d. 18 p.

[14]Alan E. Day. "This Immigrant Business." New Library World 79 (October, 1978), p. 190.

[15]Wilson, Amy Seetoo. "China Viewed Through Stories for American Children." Journal of Library Information Science. v.4 (October 1978), p.140.

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